

Duxbury Clipper

Wednesday, June 27, 2007

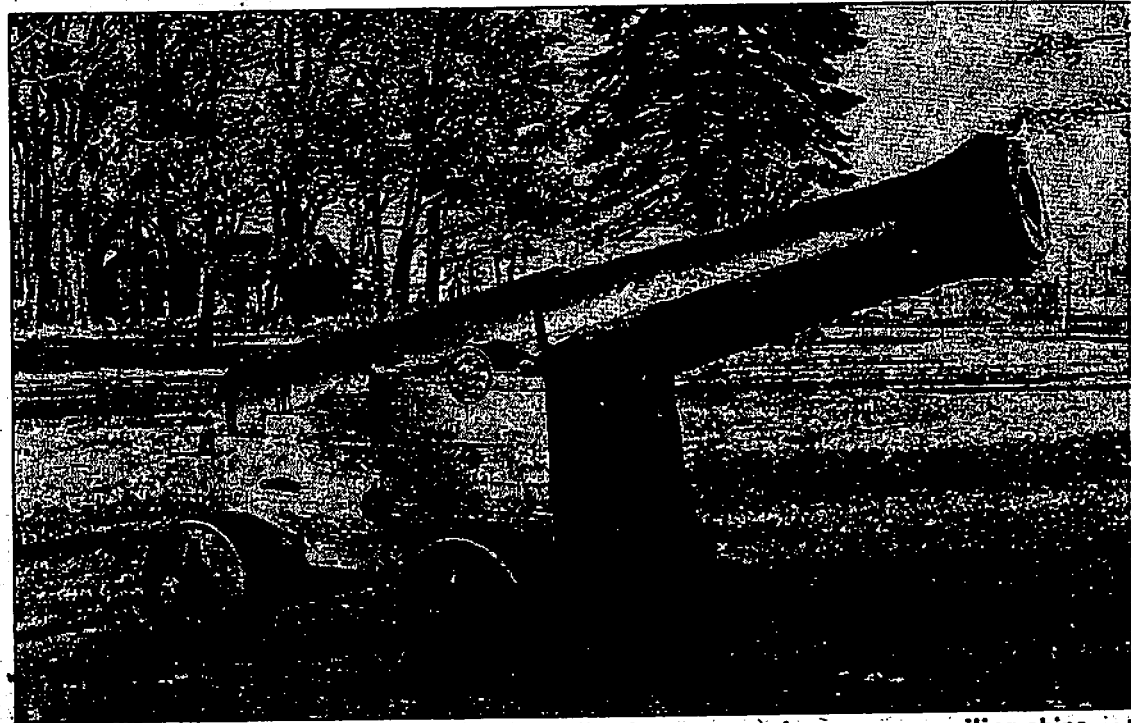
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By JOE SHEA

After President Madison declared war in June of 1812, the state militia was sent to the tip of the Gurnet to reactivate Fort Andrew. They brought with them sufficient guns to defend the entrance to Plymouth Bay, among them several of the largest guns ever to be deployed in the defense of the shipping channels of Plymouth Bay. These 42-pounders were made from used up 32-pounders that were rebored. The "pounder" designation was a measure of the weight of the solid shot the guns could fire. At the end of the Revolutionary War many of the 32-pounders had been so heavily used that they had worn away the inside of the gun barrel to the point that they could no longer use the standard 32-pound projectiles. Some of those guns were made with extra iron to avoid having them explode in service. Engineers rebored the barrels to make them smooth again and developed a new "42 pound" exploding shell that used much less gunpowder. These were the first of a new class of guns known as Columbiads. They were used for coastal defense and were real ship killers.

The cannons at Fort Andrew would have been like the guns one has seen on sailing ships with the small wheels or mounted on iron bases that allowed them to be aimed through an arc that allowed overlapping coverage. Since this was essentially the same fort used in the revolutionary war the guns were tucked in behind the earthen walls of the

Fort Andrew and The War of 1812 Part 1



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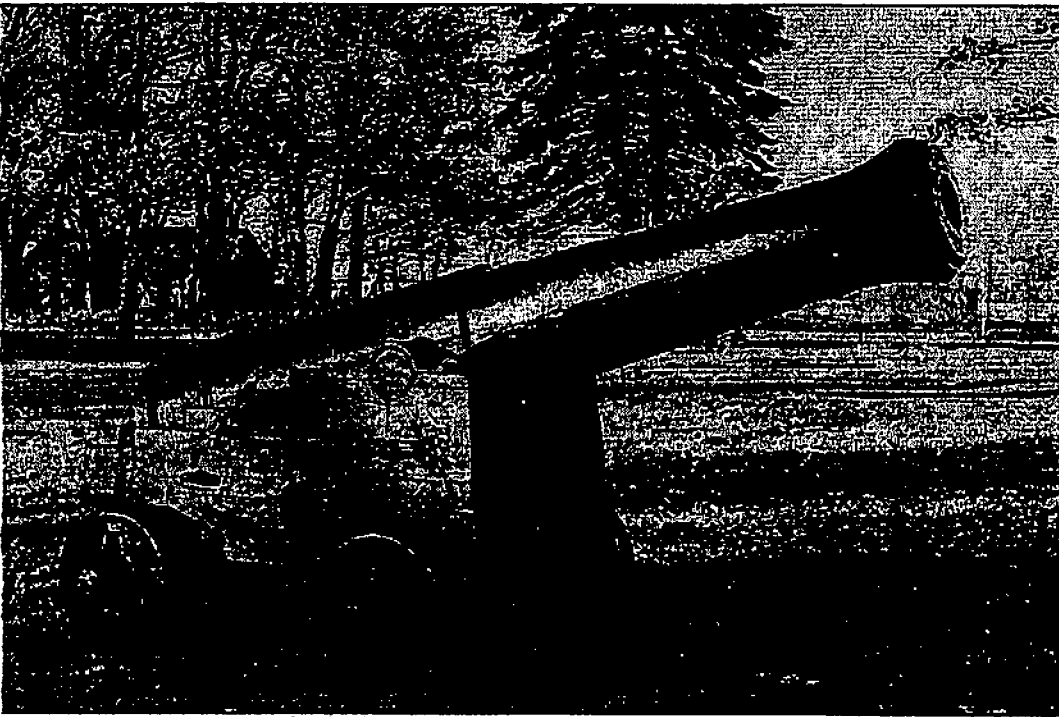
At the beginning of hostilities the embargo along the northeast coast was based on the British catching our ships at sea. Some limited trade frequently ran along the coast, hoping the British would not or could not chase them in the relative shallows and estuaries. In July of 1814, two barges from His Britannic Majesty's Ship *Hogue*, a 74 gun ship, were pursuing an American crew smuggling flour in a small boat bound for Boston. The American crew ran for cover under the guns of Fort Andrew, which promptly fired on the barges. The second shot, at the extreme range of three miles, struck and caused the loss of one of the two barges. There were some allegations that the fort continued to fire a few rounds at the men in the water who had abandoned their barge. No one was hurt and the

Hogue did not press the issue. The sails, water casks and other usable equipment were stripped off the barge by the Duxbury schooner *Despatch* and brought to port. Later the barge was recovered and towed into Plymouth. In the civilized way some wars were fought the barge was returned to the Royal Navy at their request. Perhaps this was done to mollify the powerful fleet just offshore.

With the commencement of hostilities the English did not have the manpower or ships to truly seal all the lesser ports. *Hogue* was but one ship, others were *Leander*, 58 guns, *Nymph*, 38 guns and *Spencer* mounting 74 guns. They were seeking revenge, cruising Massachusetts Bay and the Gulf of Maine hoping to draw out the *U.S.S. Constitution* for a fight on their terms. While on patrol they were seizing local

fishing boats as smugglers and capturing such merchant men as dared to run the blockade. Some merchantmen managed to evade capture but a few were taken as prizes of war and sent to Halifax, Nova Scotia. The coverage was initially thin as the Royal Navy was tied up in a war in Europe. That changed and the Royal Army and Navy were then free to focus on the issues in North America. The Royal Navy, having recently beaten the combined fleets of France and Spain, was the most powerful in the world and felt they could strike with impunity. Strike they did. Commercial raids by the Royal Navy inflicted serious damage on coastal communities. In Essex, Connecticut a raid led by the *Hogue* destroyed 27 ships in port and did a lot of damage before slipping away unchallenged. Wareham, Mattapoisett and Scituate were

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attacked and many other coastal towns threatened. Usually the Royal Navy sent in their Marines to burn the local sailing vessels and sometimes would come back and burn parts of the town. The Marines would row ashore in what were then called "barges." Today we would call them large row boats. They had up to 12 rowers and could carry a lot of people or cargo in shallow water. They also had sails and obviously could go where the warship could not. Some barges mounted swivel guns which were very small portable cannons. Once among the moored vessels they would burn them and then attempt to burn the waterfront warehouses and boatyards.

Duxbury felt more protection was needed than Fort Andrew could provide. Once you got past the guns there would be nothing to prevent an attacker from destroying at will any shipping or port facilities in Plymouth Harbor. The Duxbury Town leaders applied to the Massachusetts War Board for more cannon, shot and powder. The head of the War Board, a General Cobb, observed that "it would be a waste of time as the inhabitants would not know what to do with them." Governor Brooks intervened on behalf of the Town and two field pieces (guns with large wheels for towing) and a supply of powder and shot were provided. Plymouth sent three more field pieces and the Town was able to acquire some others. These were deployed primarily into two forts built on the side of the entrance to the Bluefish River.